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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [EAID](#) [AR](#)
SUBJECT: NEW GOVERNMENT PLAN REFLECTS GROWING IMPORTANCE OF
CITIZEN SECURITY ISSUE TO ARGENTINES

REF: BUENOS AIRES 102

Classified By: Ambassador Wayne for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) Summary: President Fernandez de Kirchner announced a new public security plan on March 27 to respond to rising public concerns about crime. The plan is focused on the provinces of Buenos Aires and Mendoza and includes promises of 4,000 new police to patrol the streets, a redeployment of gendarmerie (frontier guard) forces, and substantial purchases of equipment such as vehicles and public video cameras. The announcement received some positive press as a belated but necessary response to a perceived rise in criminality, but also drew complaints for a lack of strategic focus. Minister of Justice and Security Anibal Fernandez had to clarify the next day that, although the plan envisioned hiring of retired as well as previously dismissed police, only those who had been dismissed for minor infractions would be considered for reinstatement. The new measures probably reflect pressures from Kirchner allies in the provinces that the government needs to act on public security concerns, especially given Congressional elections in June. This is the first major response by the federal government to these public concerns. The new measures may also signal an opportunity for greater U.S. engagement as well, as they open the door wider to cooperation with partners on law enforcement and public security issues. End summary.

12. (SBU) Against the backdrop of mid-term congressional elections June 28 and polling showing crime and security as the top public concern, President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK) on March 27 announced a security initiative focused on the Provinces of Buenos Aires and Mendoza (plan "Convivencia Ciudadana"). The Plan calls for an expenditure of 400 million pesos (USD 108 million) and the hiring of up to 4,000 retired police, the redeployment of 1,500 gendarmerie (frontier guard) to troubled urban and peri-urban areas, the purchase of 500 patrol cars, and the installation of 5,000 security cameras.

13. (SBU) In announcing the plan, CFK acknowledged the legitimacy of public concerns about crime but also took a stab at the media for fanning public fears. She suggested that those who have traveled to other large cities in the world would know that the media abroad covered crime differently than in Argentina, where a single case of rape or murder or kidnapping was covered incessantly on television "from morning until night," leaving the impression that there had been "350 crimes rather than one or two." She urged people not to "sensationalize" but to "search for solutions." President Fernandez de Kirchner also shared her views on the socio-economic sources of criminality, noting that

unemployment and wealth disparities fed crime. This, she said, meant that any plan for public security must also encompass "a model for economic development and income redistribution."

14. (SBU) Two elements in CFK's announcement drew immediate questions. The first was a line suggesting that former military officers would be considered for law enforcement jobs. Human rights groups questioned the wisdom and constitutionality of the step, and it was quickly retracted by Casa Rosada sources as an error. The second issue revolved around announced plans to fill 4,000 new police positions in the two provinces with retired police officers but also some dismissed for cause. Questioned about the suitability of hiring dismissed officers, Justice Minister Fernandez clarified that only those dismissed for minor infractions would be considered for reinstatement.

Another Ad Hoc Response?

15. (SBU) Experts and opposition politicians reacted with a number of criticisms to the President's "plan," while fervent Kirchner supporters have mostly downplayed the security issue rather than address this response. One independent Peronist, Paola Spatola of the "Guardia Peronista," said rehiring dismissed officers would be "a mistake." Opposition politician Eugenio Burzaco of Buenos Aires-based center-right PRO also questioned the hiring of dismissed police, and described the overall plan as little more than a bandage. Norberto Quantin, who had played a planning role on security issues for President Nestor Kirchner, criticized the

government's decision to announce the resource side of their plan without a larger strategic vision; he described the government response as "incoherent," suggesting it was motivated primarily by "electoral" considerations. Left-of-center daily "Critica" wryly noted similarities between the 2009 plan and one announced in 2004 by former President Nestor Kirchner, a plan for new police and patrol cars that it said had gone largely unimplemented. It dubbed the plan after Susana Jimenez, the country's popular talk-show host, who has made a significant issue out of citizen security. Critica also noted that law enforcement agencies, including the Police and Gendarmerie, had received budget cuts in recent days just as the supplemental plan was being announced.

16. (SBU) Local security analyst Marcela Donadio of the think-tank SER 2000 told Poloff March 30 that the initiative simply did not constitute a "plan," because it addressed only resources without much thought about how they would be used. The real "force of the plan," she said, was the redeployment of more gendarmerie to help with crime patrols in Buenos Aires. This was the only law enforcement force in Argentina that maintained its prestige in the eyes of the public.

17. (C) Gendarmerie Commanding General Hector Schenone confided to ICE Country Attache his concern about finding the personnel to fulfill the Casa Rosada's mandate, asking "where am I going to pull so many men from?" He told the Ambassador that they would do their best to deploy but that the task was immense. Unnamed Gendarmerie sources quoted in "Perfil," an independent newspaper critical of the Kirchners, went so far as to say that the redeployments from border-policing would leave Argentina open to drug-trafficking across the northern border, a concern that Schenone did not raise. Asked about this particular concern, analyst Donadio suggested the Gendarmerie would be more likely to take men from infrastructure protection roles than from the borders.

18. (C) Comment: The critics of the GOA's security plan undoubtedly make many telling points. The plan appears to have been launched without a great deal of strategic thinking, at least as presented to the public. A close aide to Buenos Aires Governor Daniel Scioli told the Ambassador that Scioli had pressed the Kirchners very hard to get the assistance as his public in the BA suburbs was increasingly

upset and critical because of the increase in crime, much of it perceived to be drug related. Scioli and others also apparently argued that without action on public security in BA Province, the government could not expect to do well in June Congressional elections, and BA Province is where the Kirchners need to win.

¶9. (C) Whatever the motivations, the fundamental recognition by the government of a crime problem and its announced intention to apply more law enforcement resources to securing the environs of greater Buenos Aires represents a step forward. The government realizes that this issue has political resonance and that it needs to be seen making progress, in areas from violent crimes to narcotics trafficking to trafficking in persons.

¶10. (C) The new measures, and the public mood that they reflect, also would seem to open the door wider to cooperation with partners on law enforcement, anti-narcotics, public security and justice issues, including with the United States. While our engagement needs to be relatively cautious in the run-up to the June elections, we should take the opportunity now to begin exploring possibilities for collaboration in public security, including via regional initiatives. This is an issue that matters to Argentines of every class and background.

WAYNE